

# Assembly Bill 242 (Pedro Nava)

## Dogfighting Prevention Act of 2009

### Reason AB 242 is Necessary

It is estimated that 40,000 people are involved in the blood sport of organized dogfighting resulting in injury or death to nearly 250,000 dogs (mostly pit bulls) annually. Law enforcement projects that at least 100,000 additional persons (many between the ages of 13 and 17) participate in "street level" dogfights. Numerous organizations and reports have called for stricter sentencing for dogfight participants and spectators in an effort to quell the expansion of this illegal activity.

### Existing Law

Under federal law, it is a felony to organize a dogfight or participate in interstate commerce or activities related to animal fighting. Each offense – one per dog – is punishable by up to a \$250,000 fine and a three-year jail term.

Dogfighting is illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands prohibit being a spectator at a dogfight. See attached chart for specific state-by-state information.

### **California Penal Code Section 597.5 (b)**

proscribes that any "person who is knowingly present, as a spectator, at any place, building, or tenement where preparations are being made for an exhibition of the fighting of dogs, or is knowingly present...at that exhibition...is guilty of a misdemeanor."

### This Bill

AB 242 (Nava):

- Elevates spectatorship at a dogfighting exhibition from a misdemeanor to a felony.

### Facts

- According to the **Humane Society of the United States**, dogfighting is a "sadistic 'contest' in which two dogs – specifically bred, conditioned and trained to fight – are placed in a pit to fight each other for the spectators' entertainment and gambling. Fights often last more than two hours and end when one of the dogs will not or cannot continue."
- Dogs used in fights often die of blood loss, shock, dehydration, exhaustion or infection hours or even days after the event.
- Spectators provide much of the profits associated with dogfighting. The money generated by admission fees and gambling helps keep this "sport" alive. Because dogfights are illegal and therefore not widely publicized, spectators do not merely happen upon a fight – they seek it out.
- Dogfighting is on the rise. According to **Pet-Abuse.com**, a Website that attempts to keep track of dogfighting citations, the number of police cases for this activity for the past three years are as follows:
  - 2007: 167 cases
  - 2006: 127 cases
  - 2005: 129 cases

## **Facts (continued)**

- Other concerns regarding dogfights are numerous:
  - Illegal gambling is the norm.
  - Firearms and other weapons are typically found at events, due to the large amount of cash present.
  - Illegal drugs are often sold and used at dogfights.
  - Young children are sometimes present at events which can promote insensitivity to animal suffering, enthusiasm for violence and a lack of respect for the law.
- A study by the **Chicago Police** of incidents between 2001 and 2004 found that in 362 dogfighting cases, 59% of dog owners had gang affiliations and 66% had been arrested at least twice before.

**Assemblymember Pedro Nava, through AB 242**, hopes that by making spectatorship at dogfights in California a felony, this illegal activity and its detrimental effects on animals will be dramatically reduced or eliminated.

## **Support**

The Humane Society of the United States  
(sponsor)

## **Opposition**

N/A

## **Votes**

N/A

## **For More Information**

Consultant: Jackie Koenig (916) 319-2035